

Military Industrial Complex: Power, Privilege and Profit

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You are all, no doubt, well acquainted with the phrase ‘when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail’. Apparently, it’s an old CIA adage which is not too surprising. It fits well in a discussion of the arms trade and its relevance to this launch of Lex Innocentium 21. I’m going to argue here that when it comes to the arms trade, it’s such a major avenue of power and profit that in preserving and even extending U.S. and NATO hegemony ‘the hammer defines politics and the world looks like a set of nails’ to those who reap its benefits.¹

The innocents we are referring to in the new law are increasingly the expendable victims of normalised wars and the earth itself which sustains all life. Through the greed and inhumanity of war profiteers and a militarised mindset, violence for profit is a threat to the future of humanity and the planet we live on.

Can we call ourselves innocents when our governments are complicit in this process?

The Military Industrial Complex is the process that manages this. It is a deadly and corrupt system of manufacturers, militaries, states and alliances organising for war. It counts its profits in billions and its cost in human lives. Former U.S. President Eisenhower in 1961 famously warned the U.S., today the world’s largest arms producer ‘to guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought of MIC’² This has not happened and such is its extent today, it may be more accurate to characterise this as the military-industrial-academic-bureaucratic-complex (and we can probably add ‘media’ as an intrinsic element). It is a lawless, deadly, corrupt and hugely profitable system with a revolving door where its cogs move in and out of different sectors military, civil service, arms manufacture and politics. Its profits come at the expense of human lives, innocents and expendable people in Gaza, Ukraine, Yemen, Sudan, DR Congo etc. This vile trade costs at least half a million lives every year. The obvious connection between arms and the loss of lives is not reported in the profit accounts of the ‘merchants of death’.

Total global military expenditure reached \$2 trillion 443 billion in 2023, an increase of 6.8 per cent in real terms from 2022. This was the steepest year-on-year increase since 2009. The 10 largest spenders in 2023 - led by the United States, China and Russia - all

¹ Vijay Prashad, in *Monstrous Anger of the Guns*, p. 47

² Quoted in Vijay Mehta, ‘The Economics of Killing’, p.12

increased their military spending³. The giant corporations that dominate the trade are Lockheed Martin, BAE Systems, Boeing, Northrup Gruman, Raytheon and more. The MIC is growing more international and transnational as the EU is now a much bigger player. The European Peace Facility and European Defence Fund are the funding mechanisms that facilitate the development of state of the art 'defence technology' (as they call it). As European arms manufacture and export has significantly increased with Ukraine war (and through the NATOisation of the EU) the production of large conventional weapons, homeland and security products, surveillance systems, AI developments, militarised border systems and especially nuclear weapons are all on the increase. Though the majority of countries in the world support the Treaty for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) the nuclear powers have been ramping up and the five members of the Security Council, all nuclear powers & the biggest arms manufacturers in the world, are increasing their spending on nuclear weapons. We haven't been as near to a nuclear confrontation since the Cuba Missile crisis and the Doomsday Clock is now closer to the hour than ever. The arms trade drives this insanity and make no mistake a Third World War would be a Last World War. The myth of the feasible strategic use of nuclear weapons is one that could bring us to the endgame of life on the planet.

So, the arms trade and the Military Industrial Complex are sustained by a series of myths that are repeated so often that they are rarely actually scrutinised. Chief among these myths is the notion that weapons make us more secure and therefore more weapons means we are somehow safer. The narrative around militarised security is driven by a small elite who reap the benefits of arms sales and an economy driven by militarism which is central to the illogic of contemporary capitalism. National security pre-empts human and ecological security. The political establishment defines 'national interests' and disconnects this from the needs of people and the natural world that sustains us. This is a very short-term outlook on security and presents military threats as the main risk overlooking long term drivers of insecurity such as climate breakdown. Militarism is a huge contributor to the global climate crisis, yet the impacts are often exempted from key environmental standards so, the real costs are hidden. There is even a crazy suggestion that these environmental costs can be made greener with technological adaptations. The notion of greener wars is beyond farcical when wars in themselves cause huge intentional environmental damage. Even the preparations for war we are now witnessing (according to UK & EU) has a huge impact on the environment, with weapons testing, war exercises, poisoned water and increased carbon costs. (Pentagon one of biggest polluters on earth) Long term notions of security get in the way of the MIC greed for profit, power and privilege through arms sales and it suits the system that runs the world to propagate such

³ www.sipri.org

myths in their own interests but not for our benefit. Let's be clear: the project of MIC actually makes us less safe and significantly contributes to the climate crisis and the threat of nuclear annihilation.

Here's a few things to consider in relation to militarism and weapons production:

- 40% of corruption in all business is said to take place in the arms trade (Feinstein)⁴
- Unit costs of military hardware are shocking e.g. F-35 aircraft costs in the region of US \$80-100 million per unit
- The U.S. spends more on so-called 'defence' than the five next biggest countries combined and NATO countries comprise almost 70% of global arms spending.
- The justification of levels of military spending requires the maintenance of a constant climate of fear (media perform well here)
- Ireland wants to be a player in the arms industry and avail of EU incentives. We are already exporters but largely hide this under the euphemism/lie of 'dual use'.
- NATO expansion is very much in the interest of arms manufacturers. In Sweden and Finland arms industries stand to profit from their membership of NATO and their ability to collaborate on joint weapons projects with firms in larger NATO countries. They were among the cheer leaders for NATO membership.
- Yet there is more to militarism than the arms trade which is a key symptom
- There is an increasing convergence between military and civilian spheres of society
- Military elites are afforded radical monopolies through subsidies to provide military services
- Security is increasingly defined as whatever can be met by military means
- Diplomacy is an alternative to militarism, though its increasingly militarised too. However, the U.S. employs more people to maintain a single aircraft carrier than it has diplomats across the entire world (It has 12 aircraft carriers)
- 'It is vital to promote alternatives and break the cycle of profitable militarism for the sake of democracy, accountability, justice, equality and a safer more peaceful world'.⁵

To summarise and conclude:

1. The MIC implies a mindset and a culture that sees military force as the only real response to perceived security threats. Why negotiate if you have a hammer that can clobber your adversary (How primitive we civilised people are)

⁴ www.shadowworldinvestigations.org

⁵ 'Monstrous Anger of the Guns: How the Global Arms Trade is Ruining the World', ed. Michie, R. Feinstein, A. & Rogers, P. Pluto Books, 2024

2. The arms trade is highly profitable and corrupt. Commission is the word used to mask its corruption. Yet the people who produce and profit are called business men not criminals and sell their wares publicly despite the lack of transparency of the trade.
3. The role of the arms industry is central to the pursuit of power, wealth and victory in war. This remains vital to the dog eat dog 'rules-based order' where western powers make and enforce the rules.
4. Those who oppose militarism, like ourselves through this initiative, will be defined as defeatist, traitors or even enemies of the state.
5. The MIC needs wars to thrive so the abolition of war and the killing of innocents should be our goal. This launch of LI21 today is an important statement of this demand and the absolute necessity of developing nonviolent alternatives to weapons and wars.

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